

MATTHEW JOSEPHSON. *Edison*. (New York: Mc Graw-Hill. 1959. Pp. xii + 511. \$6.95.)

Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) has long interested economists and economic historians because of the wide range of his inventive activities, and because he became deeply involved in the production and sale of many of his inventions. This comprehensive biography treats in detail Edison's business enterprises and the economic environment in which he operated. The American business scene in the interval of Edison's active business career - 1870 to World War I - is, of course, familiar ground to Josephson, author also of *The Robber Barons*.

Despite Edison's importance in the growth of the American economy (he invented and manufactured in these major industries: telegraph, telephone, electric light and power, motion pictures, phonograph, storage battery, and cement) and Josephson's obvious qualifications, one might ask whether still another biography is justified in view of the tremendous volume of material already published on Edison. The best answer is that Josephson is the first Edison biographer with complete access to all of the documents in the Edison Laboratory (a National Monument of the U.S. National Park Service since 1956) at West Orange, New Jersey.

These documents include about 250,000 items of correspondence and memoranda, 3,400 laboratory notebooks, the original invention sketches, the tools Edison used, and the books he read and annotated. A second reason for a new Edison biography is that none has been written for thirty years - an interval of increasing interest in technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. To recast and re-evaluate Edison's activities in terms of these concepts has proved a worthwhile task.

The author has presented a balanced, well-documented picture of Edison as a man, an inventor, and a businessman. His well-known successes and virtues are treated fully, but his failures and shortcomings are also discussed at length. Although Edison was an outstanding example of the lone inventor, he was one of the first to organize research as a group activity. (The U.S. Naval Research Laboratory was established at his suggestion.) Thus Josephson's book is a rich source for anyone interested in the myriad details, as well as the major achievements, of Edison's life.

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